

people on September 11, 2001, we all  
learned just exactly what connects us as

to offer relief from its devastation.

## Get to work on salvage

*A poll finds that Oregonians support a careful policy of salvage and replanting on burned-over federal forests*

A new poll shows that three out of every four Oregonians want federal forests restored after wildfires by salvaging burned trees and replanting with seedlings. The fourth, no doubt, wants to sue to stop the Forest Service from doing anything.

A June survey of 607 registered voters by an independent polling firm showed that a large majority of Oregonians still holds to the common-sense view that after fire sweeps across a forest, some blackened timber should be put to productive use, and in many cases seedlings should be planted to replace the dead trees.

But that is not how it works now. The Forest Service launches an environmental review and salvage planning process that can drag on as long as two years. The fire-killed trees start rotting. Environmental groups appeal the Forest Service salvage and recovery plan. Then they sue. By the time a judge rules, all but the largest trees are rotten to the core.

Current post-fire policy is a failure. The Forest Service spends millions of dollars writing plans for salvage and restoration projects, many of which will never happen, often because there's no money left to pay for them. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of board feet of marketable timber are left to topple over and rot, even though rural Northwest communities are dying for jobs, even though the global demand for wood and pulp continues unabated.

It has come to this: A dead tree in the Northwest is now considered more precious than a live one about to be cut down in a poorly protected rain forest somewhere else in the world.

This page is not for a radical salvage program. The few timber industry calls for taking 2 billion board feet out of the Biscuit fire were just as ridiculous as the environmental claim that any helicopter logging of blackened trees there amounted to "clear-cutting paradise."

There are many places where timber salvage is a bad idea, where soil compaction, erosion or other damage from logging causes environmental harm that exceeds its economic benefits. Respected scientists disagree about how best to help forests recover from wildfires, and many now argue that a leave-it-alone approach is often best.

Yet there must be a thoughtful middle ground somewhere on salvage and recovery of federal forests. When a fire burns a hundred thousand acres of an Oregon forest, surely a small percentage of the burned area can be safely and promptly salvaged — before the trees rot — and certainly much of it ought to be reseeded or replanted.

The Northwest members of Congress who led the effort to pass healthy forest legislation — including Rep. Greg Walden and Sen. Gordon Smith, both R-Ore. — are now working on a similar bill to expedite timber salvage.

Skeptics keep saying that Congress won't be able to work out a deal because post-fire salvage is much more controversial than thinning to prevent forest fires. There is no public consensus on salvage, they claim.

The recent poll suggests otherwise. Oregonians know very well that fire salvage policy on federal lands is now a big waste of time, money, wood and jobs. Their elected leaders know it. The only question left is whether anybody is going to do anything about it.

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# EDITORIALS

## What Oregonians want

A lot of environmental groups these days object to the practice of logging and replanting federal forests devastated by wildfire. Chainsaws and saplings aren't always the proper recipe for forest regeneration, of course. But the idea that we should sit by and work on our macrame while valuable timber topples to the ground is shared by so few people that it could accurately be called a fringe view.

Like most people, environmentalists don't like to be called fringe dwellers. But don't take our word for it. Consider the results of a forest management survey involving hundreds of registered voters across the state. The survey, according to *The Oregonian*, found that 75 percent of Oregonians believe logging and replanting should follow wildfires. It should be noted that the group sponsoring the survey — Communities for Healthy Forests — would be very happy with this result. Still, it was conducted by an independent polling company, Davis, Hibbits & Midghall Inc., of Portland.

Oregon is a state that voted solidly for John Kerry last year. It is a state in which the governorship and four of five House seats are held by Democrats. It is a state whose voters opted to give salmon and parks a constitutionally dedicated chunk of Lottery revenue. If three-quarters of people here consider the leave-it-don't-log-it method of wildfire recovery a little nutty, you can only imagine what people in the rest of the country think. And their opinions matter, too, because we're talking about the management of federal lands here, and federal lands belong to everybody, whether they're in Oregon or Mississippi.

Which brings us to Rep. Greg Walden and Sen. Gordon Smith, a pair of federal lawmakers who've suddenly found themselves linked, in bizarre fashion, to a forest service blunder that led recently to the logging within a botanical reserve near Grants Pass. Federal foresters accidentally mis-marked the boundaries of the Fiddler Timber Sale, which included trees killed by the 2002 Biscuit Fire. As a result, loggers cut 10 to 17 acres of the 352-acre Babyfoot Lake Botanical Area. The blunder was minuscule, it isn't a policy matter, and Walden and Smith had nothing at all to do with it.

But that hasn't stopped a coalition of environmental groups called the United Forest Defense Campaign from drawing some dots and trying to connect them. Smith and Walden have linked the group because they want to speed up the wildfire-recovery process, which now can take years. And the Babyfoot blunder, according to UFDC Communications Coordinator Steve Holmer, is exactly why such legislation — legislation that would "give the government carte blanche to expedite logging in the wake of wildfires" — shouldn't happen.

What does it say about this coalition's position that the most potent recent argument in its favor is a mapping and marking blunder that affected about a dozen acres? Talk about a stretch.

Meanwhile, evidence of the need for legislation speeding up the recovery process abounds. Two years ago, the B&B and Link fires burned more than 90,000 acres in Central Oregon, most of them within the Deschutes National Forest. The final environmental impact statement for the recovery was released this June, almost two years after the fires began, and includes plans to conduct salvage logging on only 10 percent of the burned area within the national forest. Environmentalists appealed the plan unsuccessfully, and a record of decision was signed this month. Since then, three timber sales have been awarded. And just last week, a number of environmental groups, including the Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project, the Sierra Club and the Sisters Forest Planning Committee, filed a motion for a preliminary injunction in U.S. District Court in Portland.

It looks to us that Smith and Walden, by defending a fire-recovery process three out of every four Oregonians support, are doing exactly what they're supposed to do. They're advocating on behalf of their constituents. Groups like the United Forest Defense Campaign and the Sisters Forest Planning Committee, meanwhile, are doing exactly what they so often do. They're speaking for the fringe. It's no wonder many more Oregonians polled this summer thought favorably of the timber industry (67 percent) than environmental groups (53 percent). And it's with an appreciation for irony that we await the characterization of whatever legislation Smith, Walden and like-minded lawmakers produce as extreme.

(BEND) BULLETIN  
TUES 8/30/05

# Wish Walden good luck in thinning forest bureaucracy

A repeat of the almost total waste of wood occurring on the 500,000-acre Biscuit Fire may not happen again, if U.S. Rep. Greg Walden has his way.

Walden said during a stop in Grants Pass on Wednesday he plans to introduce legislation to speed up development of forest fire recovery plans, so there's more chance to salvage trees before they rot.

U.S. Forest Service employees were so entangled in red tape it took them two years to sell any wood from the 2002 Biscuit Fire. A total of 370 million board feet was scheduled to be harvested on a mere 3.8 percent of the land, but probably only 20 percent of that will be cut. That's because rot and bugs are expected to make the rest of the wood useless to mills after this logging season ends with November and December rains.

Other major fires that burned in federal forests in 2002 have similar recovery timelines. Each year, between 2 million and 8 million acres of federal forest burn in wildfires.

Had loggers had a year or more of that two years spent planning the Biscuit recovery, the outcome might have been considerably different. More wood could have been cut, supporting more Southern Oregon jobs — and not as many green trees would have had to be harvested to keep the mills buzzing.

Also, more acreage could have been replanted to grow into healthy forest relatively quickly, rather than left to turn into tinder-dry brush fields or slowly and haphazardly return to green forest.

Of course, changing forest management these days is about as easy as sailing the Queen Mary 2 down the Rogue River, because of environmentalists and other special interests that have a stake in the woods.

However, Walden, a Republican who represents Grants Pass, Jackson County and Eastern Oregon, has had remarkable success in this area. He wrote the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, which was passed by Congress in 2003 and streamlined the process for thinning 20 million acres of federal forest. Hopefully, this will help reduce chances of fires such as Biscuit.

Walden is also chairman of the House Resources Subcommittee on Forest and Forest Health, which shapes the nation's forest policy.

Walden said he hopes to introduce this fall his bill to streamline planning after forest fires. That may be overly ambitious, given the difficulty in changing forest management and absence of fires that might catch legislators' attention, such as the Southern California fires did two years ago.

Whenever the congressman introduces his bill, good luck to him. A precious resource shouldn't have to rot in the name of bureaucracy. And "management" that allows millions of acres of this nation's forests to turn into brush fields mustn't be allowed.

Dennis Roler



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Contact your congressman